

Message Text

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R 192014Z JAN 74
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY PARIS

S E C R E T STATE 012669
C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT)
EXDIS

FOLLOWING TELEGRAM FROM TUNIS DATED JANUARY 4, 1974
SENT ACTION SECSTATE WASHDC IS REPEATED TO YOU: QUOTE

S E C R E T TUNIS 0041

EXDIS

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, TS, US

SUMMARY: ACCORDING TO MASMOUDI'S CHEF DE CABINET, MASMOUDI IS CONCERNED AT REPORTS REACHING PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA THAT FOREIGN MINISTER IS PERSONA NON GRATA IN WASHINGTON. IMPLICATION IS THAT WHITE HOUSE WILL NOT RECEIVE HIM IF HE ACCOMPANIES BOURGUIBA DURING LATTER'S PROJECTED TRIP TO WASHINGTON IN MAY. I CHARACTERIZED REPORT AS BASELESS. USG ASSIDUOUSLY AVOIDS INTERFERING IN INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF OTHER COUNTRIES AND WOULD UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES DO ANYTHING WHICH WOULD UNDERMINE THE POSITIONS OF THEIR CONSTITUTED OFFICIALS. END SUMMARY.

1. IN RESPONSE TO A LATE EVENING CALL LAST NIGHT FROM HASSEN FODHA, FOREIGN MINISTER MASMOUDI'S CHEF DE CABINET, I MET WITH HIM THIS MORNING, JANUARY 4, AT HIS OFFICE. FODHA,
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WHOM I HAVE GOTTEN TO KNOW RATHER WELL, STARTED OUT BY SAYING THAT HE HAD SOMETHING OF CONSIDERABLE DELICACY TO DISCUSS WITH ME. BECAUSE OF OUR "CLOSE FRIENDSHIP" HE CONSIDERED THAT I WOULD WELCOME HIS BEING VERY FRANK. HE RECALLED THAT

I HAD REQUESTED AN APPOINTMENT WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTER.
THIS APPOINTMENT HAD BEEN SET FOR LATE IN THE AFTERNOON AT THE FOREIGN
MINISTER'S HOME. BEFORE RECEIVING ME, FOREIGN
MINISTER MASMOUDI HAD ASKED THAT FODHA HAVE A HEART-TO-HEART
TALK WITH ME ON THIS "DELICATE MATTER".

2. FODHA SAID THAT MASMOUDI WAS CONCERNED AT REPORTS WHICH
HAD REACHED PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA AND WHICH PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA
SEEMED TO BE CREDITING THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTER IS IN EFFECT
PERSONA NON GRATA IN WASHINGTON. ACCORDING TO THESE REPORTS,
THE U.S. GOVERNMENT IS UNHAPPY WITH MASMOUDI'S "FOREIGN
POLICIES" AND, THEREFORE, THE WHITE HOUSE WILL NOT RECEIVE HIM
IF HE ACCOMPANIES PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA DURING THE LATTER'S
PROJECTED TRIP TO WASHINGTON IN MAY. (I PERSONALLY HEARD RUMOR
FROM MOROCCAN CHARGE SEVERAL WEEKS AGO THAT MASMOUDI WILL BE
REPLACED IN APRIL FOR THIS SUPPOSED REASON.) FODHA SAID THAT
MASMOUDI IS PUZZLED BY THESE REPORTS SINCE HE FEELS THAT HE
HAS BEEN A GOOD FRIEND OF THE UNITED STATES, ESTEEMS ME
PERSONALLY AND GOT THE IMPRESSION FROM HIS RIDE WITH SECRETARY
KISSINGER TO AND FROM THE PALACE DURING THE SECRETARY'S RECENT
VISIT HERE THAT HE AND THE SECRETARY GOT ALONG WELL.

3. I TOLD FODHA THAT I WELCOMED THIS OPPORTUNITY TO CLEAR UP
WHAT COULD WELL HAVE BEEN A MISUNDERSTANDING IN CONNECTION WITH
THE SECRETARY'S RECEIVING HABIB BOURGUIBA, JR. IN WASHINGTON
LAST OCTOBER, WHILE NOT HAVING HAD TIME TO RECEIVE MASMOUDI AT
THE UNITED NATIONS THE WEEK BEFORE. I SAID THAT HABIB BOURGUIBA,
JR. HAD GONE TO WASHINGTON IN CONNECTION WITH HIS POSITION AS
HEAD OF THE TUNISIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK AND THAT HE HAD REQUESTED
MEETINGS WITH ASSISTANT SECRETARIES NEWSOM AND SISCO FOR THE
PRIMARY PURPOSE OF DISCUSSING POSSIBLE U.S. INTEREST IN BIZERTE'S
BEING DEVELOPED INTO A COMMERCIAL MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR
FACILITY. AS IT HAPPENED, THE MIDDLE EAST HOSTILITIES BROKE
OUT THE DAY OF BOURGUIBA JR.'S ARRIVAL IN THE U.S., AND HE
EVIDENTLY RECEIVED AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA
TO BE CONVEYED URGENTLY TO THE SECRETARY. IT WAS FOR THIS
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REASON THAT THE SECRETARY HAD RECEIVED BOURGUIBA JR., AND I
COULD ASSURE FODHA THAT IF MASMOUDI HAD BEEN ASKED TO CONVEY
THE PRESIDENT'S URGENT MESSAGE INSTEAD OF BOURGUIBA JR.,
MASMOUDI WOULD HAVE BEEN SEEN BY THE SECRETARY.

4. RE USG ATTITUDES TOWARD MASMOUDI, I SAID THAT IT SEEMED
TO ME INAPPROPRIATE TO SUGGEST A SEPARATE MASMOUDI FOREIGN
POLICY AS DISTINCT FROM THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE TUNISIAN
GOVERNMENT HEADED BY PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA. I ASSUMED THAT
THE TWO WERE IN TANDEM AND, IF SO, I COULD THINK OF NO
TUNISIAN FOREIGN POLICY THRUST SINCE MY ARRIVAL IN TUNISIA
SOME FIFTEEN MONTHS AGO WITH WHICH THE USG TOOK EXCEPTION.
I DID RECALL THAT WASHINGTON HAD BEEN UNHAPPY SOME EIGHTEEN

MONTHS AGO WITH A LAST-MINUTE CHANGE IN THE TUNISIAN VOTE RE THE SEATING OF THE PRC AND ALSO THAT MASMOUDI'S MEETING WITH FORMER SECRETARY ROGERS AT THE UN IN FALL OF 1972 HAD NOT BEEN AN UNQUALIFIED SUCCESS. HOWEVER, I COULD SAY CATEGORICALLY THAT THE ALLEGATION THAT ANY OFFICE OR AGENCY IN WASHINGTON WOULD REFUSE TO RECEIVE MASMOUDI IS HOGWASH. EVEN IF WASHINGTON DISAPPROVED OF MASMOUDI -- WHICH IT DOES NOT RPT NOT -- IT WOULD NEVER REFUSE TO RECEIVE ANYONE THAT PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA CHOSE TO BRING WITH HIM.

5. SPEAKING PERSONALLY, I SAID THAT I HAD BEEN FAVORABLY IMPRESSED WITH THE TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT'S SUCCESSFUL EFFORT OVER THE PAST YEAR OR SO TO BUILD TUNISIA'S BRIDGES WITH THE ARAB AND AFRICAN WORLD, FOR WHICH I ASSUMED FOREIGN MINISTER MASMOUDI DESERVED MUCH OF THE CREDIT. MY RELATIONS WITH HIM HAD ALWAYS BEEN CORDIAL AND I HAD APPRECIATED THE WAY IN WHICH HE HAD REGULARLY BRIEFED ME FOLLOWING HIS VARIOUS TRIPS ABROAD. I SAID THAT EVEN THOUGH I HAPPEN TO LIKE THE FOREIGN MINISTER, THIS IS SECONDARY. FUNDAMENTALLY MY JOB IS TO ACCEPT AND GET ALONG WITH WHATEVER CONSTITUTED TUNISIAN OFFICIALS OCCUPY KEY FOREIGN MINISTRY POSITIONS AND THIS REFLECTED THE BASIC APPROACH OF MY GOVERNMENT. WE ASSIDUOUSLY AVOID INTERFERING IN THE INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF OTHER COUNTRIES AND WOULD UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES DO ANYTHING WHICH WOULD UNDERMINE THE POSITIONS OF THEIR CONSTITUTED OFFICIALS.

6. IN CONCLUSION, I SAID IT WOULD APPEAR THAT SOMEONE IS SPREADING MALICIOUS RUMORS. I SAID I WOULD BE HAPPY IF FODHA
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PASSED ALONG TO MASMOUDI EVERYTHING THAT I HAD SAID. I COULD GO OVER SAME GROUND WITH FOREIGN MINISTER IF LATTER WISHED BUT THIS NOW SEEMED UNNECESSARY. I HOPED FONMIN WOULD REALIZE THAT REPORT IS IS PERSONA NON GRATA IN WASHINGTON IS BASELESS.

7. IN REPLYING TO FODHA, I WAS ACUTELY CONSCIOUS OF THE NECESSITY OF OUR AVOIDING BECOMING INVOLVED IN OR BEING ACCUSED OF BEING INVOLVED IN A CAMPAIGN TO DENIGRATE MASMOUDI. THIS COULD REDOUND TO OUR DISADVANTAGE. DEPARTMENT IS AWARE OF OUR TURN-DOWN OF PREVIOUS EFFORT OF "OTHER SIDE" (I.E., PRIME MINISTER AND HABIB BOURGUIBA, JR.) TO ELICIT MY SUPPORT FOR AN ANTI-MASMOUDI EFFORT. NOW, AS RUMORS AROUND THAT MASMOUDI WILL SOON BE DUMPED FOR BOURGUIBA JR., IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE NOT BE ACCUSED OF CONTRIBUTING TO MASMOUDI'S POSSIBLE DEMISE. MASMOUDI HAS CONSIDERABLE POLITICAL AMBITIONS FOR THE FUTURE AND APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN CULTIVATING SUPPORT FROM ARAB CIRCLES, PERHAPS INCLUDING LIBYA, TO THIS END. WE WOULD NOT WANT TO PROVIDE AMMUNITION TO THOSE WHO MIGHT WISH SOMEDAY TO ACCUSE US OF HAVING HAD A HAND IN GETTING RID OF MASMOUDI -- ESPECIALLY SINCE THIS MIGHT AT SOME FUTURE TIME ENHANCE HIS POLITICAL ACCEPTABILITY IN CIRCLES NOT RPT NOT

WELL DISPOSED TOWARD THE UNITED STATES. IN ANY CASE, ONE COULD
ARGUE THAT KEEPING AS FOREIGN MINISTER A MAN (MASMOUDI)
EVIDENTLY WELL ACCEPTED IN THE ARAB WORLD MIGHT BE A SMARTER
BOURGUIBA MOVE AT THIS JUNCTURE -- AT LEAST UNTIL MIDDLE EAST
SITUATION IMPROVES AND CLARIFIES -- THAN BRINGING IN A MAN
(BOURGUIBA JR.) WHO IS GENERALLY CONSIDERED 200 PERCENT
PRO-AMERICAN AND INSUFFICIENTLY ATTUNED TO ARAB MAINSTREAM.
SEELYE

UNQUOTE RUSH

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